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No. 50. APRIL—MAY, 1943 Price 2d.

THE HIGHER POSITIONS

By EMILE GRIMSHAW.

After the young guitar student has become familiar with a few simple scales, and has mastered a few preliminary exercises and perhaps some easy pieces, he should gradually learn the notes on each string, starting with the first. This will enable him intelligently to form chords in the higher positions.

It is well to remember, however, that for good and speedy sight-reading the actual names of the notes will never be so useful as their actual positions on the stave and on the finger-board of the instrument. When a player becomes familiar with his instrument, he depends more on the *position* of the notes than he does on their names. Just as a child gradually ceases to spell out the letters of a word before he is able to understand it and grasp its meaning, so does a musician find that it is unnecessary to think out the names of the notes that form a chord before he can understand and play the latter. The earliest notes a banjoist or guitarist begins to know by position are those that occur on the open strings; when he sees on the printed page the two notes that occur on the second and third strings, he knows immediately where they should be played without having to think that those notes are named "G" and "B."

In the same way, a pianist who sees a printed note directly under the G or treble staff knows that it is played on the white key between the two black keys that are located nearest the centre of the piano keyboard. The fact that the note is named "D" probably never enters his mind. It is the *position* of the notes that matter. A pianist who reads at sight may have to play three or four notes with the right hand and an equal number simultaneously with the left hand. It would be quite impossible to think of all these different notes by their separate names while continuing to play the music at the correct tempo. It is the *appearance* of the notes that really matters. We recognise people in the same way—not by their names but by their *looks*. If some are easier, or more difficult or more unorthodox than others, they more readily impress themselves on our memories. The

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player who reads this article can probably think of many chord shapes and know exactly how they would be written and exactly how they would be played on his instrument without having to think or care about the names of the notes.

To learn all the notes on the entire fingerboard of any fretted instrument is not an easy task. On the piano it is quite simple because, having learned the names of the notes that occur in a single octave of a scale, the player knows them in every other octave above or below.

I am not suggesting that a player should not learn the names of the notes on his instrument, but am merely pointing out that, in my opinion, the names are much less important than the majority of young students imagine. I have known at least three teachers who have firmly believed that the first task of a would-be player is to learn the names of all the notes on a guitar, banjo, or mandolin fingerboard. This was the pupil's home-work for the first week. What a stupendous waste of time! What disillusionment for a one-time enthusiastic would-be executant! There are probably players of ten, twenty, or even thirty years' standing reading this article. Can they honestly say that they would not hesitate if asked the name of a particular note above the twelfth fret on the third or fourth string of the instrument they have played for so many years? Or do they rely entirely on position-playing?

This is one good reason why I do not advocate the use of fingerboard charts, and why I have not included a chart in any of my five instruction books. When a beginner plays the scale of C he learns the seven different notes of the scale in the easiest playing position. When he follows this with the scale of G, he can't help having impressed on his mind the note "G" as the Tonic or first degree, and he must also know the notes that are "F" otherwise he could not make them sharp. Likewise, when he plays the scale of D major, he will have no doubt about the note "D" and the additional sharpened note "C."

When the student guitarist or banjoist knows the names of the notes that occur at the first, second, third and fourth frets on all the strings of his instrument, he should then learn the names of the notes that are on the first string are far as the twelfth fret only. He should study their appearance and know what they look like: C on the second line above the staff, D in the third space above the staff, and so on, because this is the method by which he recognises them as he progresses. After this, I would study the notes at the principal position markings: fifth, seventh and ninth for the guitar, and fifth, seventh and tenth frets for the banjo.

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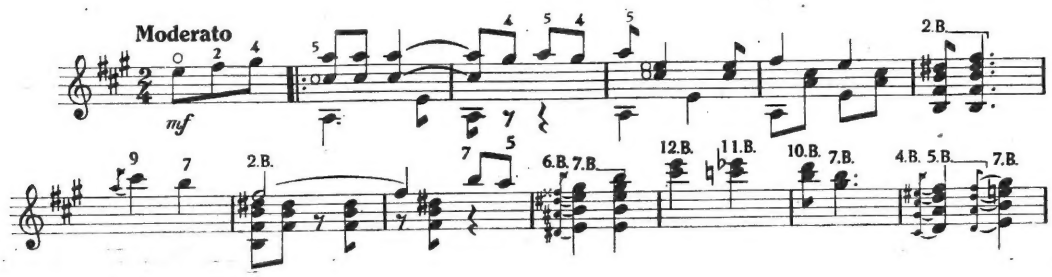
On the Beach at Waikiki

HELPFUL HINTS

FOR BANJOISTS.

The tighter a banjo vellum is kept, the more responsive it will be; but don't tighten the vellum on a wet day.

No gut string can be guaranteed true. If it is found to be false when fitted on the instrument, the string should be removed and reversed. If still false, the string is useless.

Scales should be practised without looking at the fingerboard. This method enables a player to know his instrument by the feel of it. He also becomes a better reader because he can keep his eyes on the music more of the time.

All stopped notes should be held down as long as possible against the frets. The firm holding of a note a fractional part of a second longer will improve the tone.

There are thirteen different banjo chord positions of the left hand. These are given at the foot of Page 15 in *"The Banjo and How to Play it."* At least ten minutes every day should be devoted by young players to these chords alone, playing them as written: backwards, alternately, and in every possible way.

No player can hope to impress others unless he is himself impressed with the solos he plays. Tunes for public rendition should be very carefully selected.

Many players seem to believe that there is no necessity to play a banjo expressively. They are definitely wrong. Unless a banjo solo has something in its music that can be expressed, it is not worth playing; and unless a soloist can interpret a solo and express its meaning he is not worth hearing.

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The first and second strings should be of plain wire, and the other four strings should be wire-covered.

A four-string guitar is not nearly so effective as a guitar strung, as it ought to be, with six strings. Moreover, the four-string guitar is useless as a solo instrument.

Don't bother too much about the playing of six-string chords. Four notes properly held sound much better than bigger chords with muffled notes.

The fifth and sixth strings of a guitar are most effective in the dance orchestra when they are reserved for the playing of short counter-melodies, particularly in tangos and waltzes.

Any guitarist with a sense of harmony can easily acquire this art of filling-in. The little bass runs should be used at the end of a phrase where the melody note is sustained.

The extemporised counter-melodies may be in diatonic, chromatic, or arpeggio form, and should end on a note of the harmony that is being played by other instruments.

The orthodox manner of holding the guitar is on the left thigh. Modern plectrum guitarists, however, seem to prefer to hold the instrument on the *right* thigh. This is probably because many present-day guitarists are also banjoists.

The plectrum should be neither too hard nor too soft, but the playing edge must be smooth and bevelled. The best material is tortoiseshell. The guitarist's left-hand finger-nails should be kept short so that the tips of the fingers can stop the strings without hindrance.

In order to produce good tone, the strings must be held down firmly with the left-hand fingers, and the time to press the strings very firmly is just before striking a note or chord.

When playing a first finger barré, it is better to press the strings with the inside part of the finger, not the front of the finger that is in a line with the palm of the hand. The wrist of the right hand should be kept perfectly free and slightly elevated.

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FROM OTHER PAPERS.

The place of manufacturer of the first modern guitar is unknown, but it is assumed that it was produced in Spain and modelled after the El Aud. The bitter war of races in Spain from 710 to 1274 caused a total disappearance of Arabian art in that country and led to the invention of the modern guitar. The mild climate of Spain, favourable to open-air music, the romantic spirit of the people, the habit of giving expression to the emotions through song, all required an instrument easily handled and adapted to accompanying the voice. These requirements had been found in the El Aud and the guitar became its successor. Only at the end of the sixteenth century did the latter assume its normal form and become known in France and Italy.

The El Aud, in its primitive form, had only four strings. The first guitars had five, of which the fourth and fifth were struck with the thumb and the others with the first, second and third fingers of the right hand.

Later, John August Otto, of Vienna, added a sixth string, which was universally adopted. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the popularity of the guitar in Germany, as in Spain, France and Italy, amounted to almost a craze, and the instrument was in the hands of high and low, rich and poor.—*The Musical World.*

The first of my marches that attracted any attention was called "Gladiator." I was leader of the Marine Band in Washington at the time, and the glorious salary of eighteen dollars a year disposed of any desire I might have had for great wealth. It was wealth as I saw things in those days. So, up to 1892, I sold all my compositions outright—some for as low as five dollars, and the highest price fifty dollars. Among these were The Washington Post, High School Cadets, and Semper Fidelis. I did this because I thought eighteen hundred dollars was enough for any one man to earn and squander.

The Spanish War was an inspiration to me; The Man Behind the Gun was a musical echo of it. Stars and Stripes for Ever after the news of our victory at Manila. The Washington Post was named after the oldest newspaper in Washington on an occasion commemorating its work.—John Philip Sousa in *The Theatre Magazine.*

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Different Types of Players

By CONCORD.

A long association with fretted instruments and their players has brought me in close touch with many different types of enthusiasts. Most of us have met the banjoist or guitarist who has no knowledge of written music and plays entirely by ear. Many of these are really capable executants. Some of the soloists are clever at picking up favourite melodies and adding harmonies that are passably correct, and they usually seem just as happy and enthusiastic with their instruments as others who are able to read and play from notation.

Most of these players probably believe that the reading of music is an art that is difficult to acquire and that would possibly occupy too much of their available time. I believe the majority of music-readers will agree with me that they are wrong. After a little preliminary study of the pitch of notes, first on the stave and then on the finger-board of the instrument and a study of the relative duration of notes, everything else is acquired gradually, almost without conscious effort.

I have known at least three banjoists in world-famous dance bands who could not read a note of music. Once they knew the tune and had become familiar with the harmonies they managed fairly well until, with the introduction of modern orchestrations and modern harmony, they were eventually found out.

Another type of player is the one who considers his instrument only from the commercial aspect. He knows what all the best dance bands are playing, and where they are playing. He knows the names of half-a-dozen chords, how to finger six-string guitar chords, and what the editors of dance band papers are saying, but he does not know that the banjoist or guitarist who plays his instrument really well is the one who plays it primarily because he loves to play it for its own sake.

Even if a banjoist or a guitarist is expected to play only a rhythmic chord accompaniment in the dance orchestra, he will certainly do it much better if he is able to play solos *and enthuse over his solos.* He will find himself playing the guitar in the dance orchestra as it should be played—with little inspired counter-melodies and improvisations.

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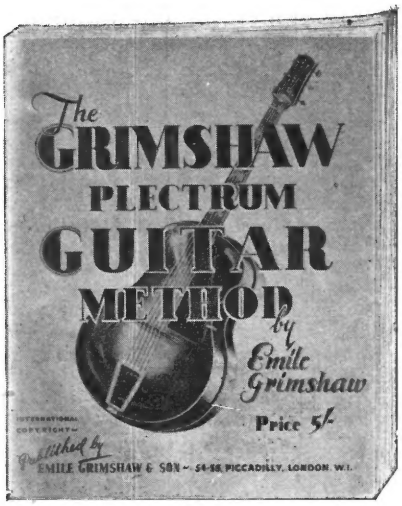

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Byron Davies talks on:—

Plans for Banjo Boosting

I took up the banjo merely as diversion—"to keep me young"—I had no thought of becoming known as its propagandist. But publicity, boosting, banging the big drum runs in my blood; I just "can't help it"; and it was once said that if I were on a desert island I would start boosting the appeal of nuts to the monkeys!

Everywhere I've been welcomed in banjoland. I seem already to have a following, and during the past fortnight I've received nearly forty letters, giving promise of help with my plans. I felt that, as well as talk, I must "ACT," to give some demonstration of the stuff I'm made of—so I'm starting off with a Concert, as announced in this issue.

Several leading professionals and amateurs have promised their services as artistes; some have generously promised to appear without payment. Will any other banjoists (I need several more for the programme) kindly write me c/o Pickings, or to 7, Lexham Gardens, W.8.

Early application for tickets will be appreciated, and if we can sell out the tickets for the afternoon show by an early date I shall run an evening Concert on the same day, with, I hope, a complete change of programme. Any help you can give me in my gallant one-man fight will be appreciated. The object of the Concert is (a) for propaganda of the instrument, and (b) if any profit results to put it towards a Fund for starting a permanent Club Headquarters. Note the date of the Concert, Saturday, 26th June.

In addition to the Concert or Concerts I may be able on the same day to hold a Meeting, to tell all interested of future plans and objects of the National Society of Banjoists. I am compiling the Handbook of the Society, which will give full details of ambitious plans which I am sure will interest every devotee of the banjo, as well as encouraging a great influx of new learners. Every effort will be made to have the Handbook ready at the date of the Concert.

Many of my correspondents affirm that I've a hard nut to crack. Well, I consider them the most tasty kind. If this had been an easy job someone would have done it long ago. Had they not, then I would be giving it to a schoolboy to do. If it's a he-man's job, it will suit me, and I'll tackle it as though with a banjo fitted with a twelve-foot neck. I'll make mistakes, no doubt, but I'll only make them once. I'll never let the same bee sting me twice. The "man who boomed dancing" will not, must not, fail in this little Hobby of his!

I hope to get some of the U.S.A. Forces at the Concert. They'll sure get a surprise when they see and hear what some of us Britishers can do with an instrument so associated with their country.

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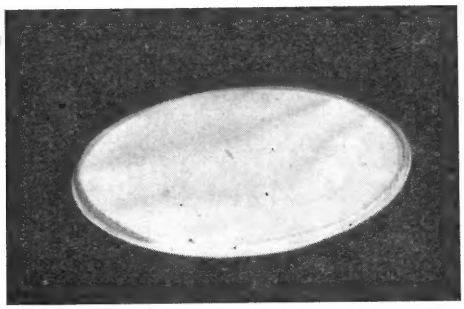

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